



Neighborhood
Parents Network

* welcome to
our new look!

PARENT TO PARENT

*Winter 2010:
Total Parent Health*



How to Eat Right for Life...PAGE 7

Five Ways to Say Goodbye to Mean Mommy...PAGE 14

Helping Young Children Make A Difference...PAGE 16



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OUR MISSION

Connecting a diverse community of families with the resources they need to navigate parenting in the city.

PARENT TO PARENT

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Parent to Parent contains articles and information contributed by parents for parents. For information about advertising and editorial submissions, visit nnpnparents.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

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Letter from the Executive Director

Welcome to the Wonderful Land of Oz! Behind the NPN curtain you will find Firebelly Design. Thanks to their creativity and generous grant, we have officially jumped out of the old and into the new. Our brand new website is just around the corner!



This milestone deserves a party! Kick into the New Year with NPN. Lil' Kickers Bradley Place is hosting our 1st NPN Pre-New Year's Eve Celebration Event. Celebrate NYE one day early—free and members only.

With each new year, I think about trying something new and finding ways to help others. For something new, check out Parent Perks—100+ special offers from our business members, ranging from discounted fitness to financial planning. Just for NPN members!

For ways to help, pass along the things you no longer need. Here are a few ideas:

- Open Books – donate books and help fund literacy programs (213 W. Institute Place)
- Bundle of Joy Diaper Bank – drop off diapers at Flourish Studios (3020 N. Lincoln Avenue)
- NPN Discussion Forum – “Buy Sell Swap” and find ideas from parents on where to donate items

Happy Holidays from all of us at NPN!
Sarah Cobb



Neighborhood
Parents Network

KICK IN THE NEW YEAR WITH NPN AND LIL' KICKERS!

*
* **Grab the kids and head over for an evening of FREE celebration and fun!**

What: NPN Pre-New Year's Eve Family Celebration

Where: Lil' Kickers Bradley Place, 2640 B W. Bradley, Chicago, IL

When: Thursday, Dec. 30, 2010 from 4:30pm-7:30pm

Who: NPN Member families only. RSVP online.

Support NPN with a suggested \$10 donation per family at the door.

For more information and to RSVP, visit www.npnparents.org



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Lincoln Park.....	Ann Hickey/Shannon Blaha
Near West-South Side.....	Lisa Kulisek/Gina Joslin/ Francine Verlotta
Northwest Side.....	Mary Maher/Cathy Carpenter Hollinger
Old Town-Gold Coast.....	Karmen Conrad/Aimee Thompson
Portage Park.....	Cyrus Clausen/Lisa Falconer
Rogers Park.....	Beth Burkhart/Geoff Burkhart
South Side.....	Wanjeri Gatundu Farley
West Town.....	Amy Johnson/Kelly Cantwell
Adoption.....	Tammy Miller/Julie Rakay
Asian.....	Jennifer Uson/Ying Zhan
Attachment Parenting.....	Crissy Pellegrin
Dads.....	Michael Schaefer/Ian Smithdahl
Developmental Differences.....	Ellen Sternweiler/Kandalyne Hahn
Green Parenting.....	Alicia Hawbecker/Kaila Kirkpatrick
Moms' Night Out.....	Allison Andre
Moms Over 35.....	Gina Ferraro/Marie Lona
Multiples.....	Eileen Richards/Cari Matykiewicz
New Members.....	Shannon Colteu
Not So New Parents.....	Bernadette Pavlik
Same Sex Parents.....	Janice McGeehan/Monique Urban
Single Parents.....	Angela Kezon
Working Mom.....	Marietta Coles/Rebekah Kohmescher

Resources

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Are you interested in volunteering?

There are so many fun ways to get involved. We are looking for parents who want to:

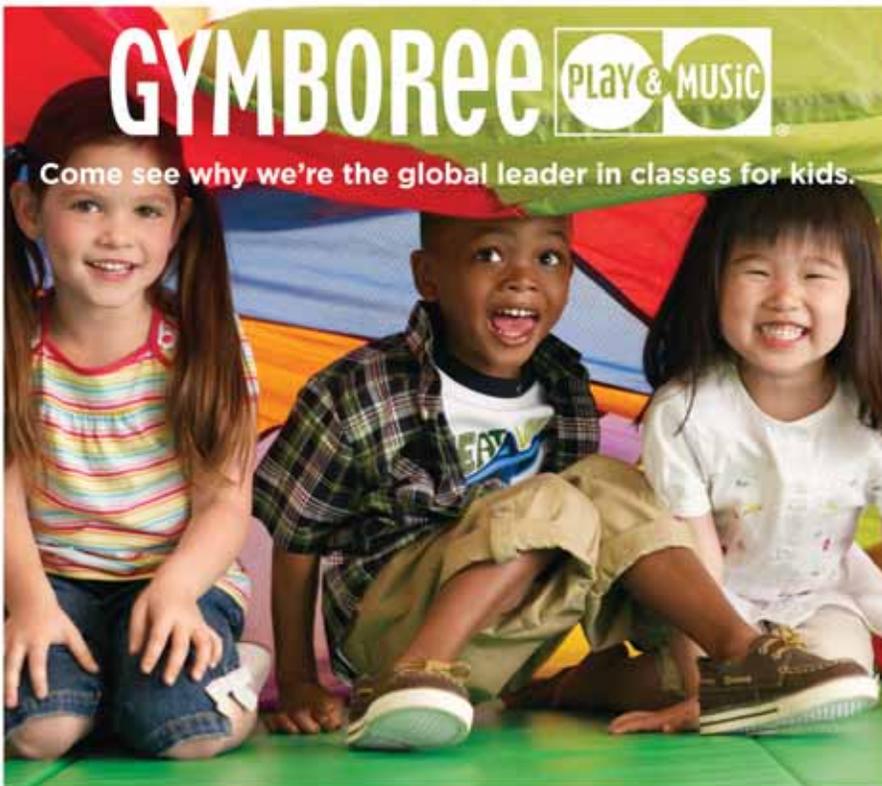
*plan events for one of these groups:

Lincoln Square-North Center
Expectant Moms
Moms' Night Out
Parents of One
Single Parents

*participate in one of these committees:

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Strategic Planning/Technology Project
School Fair & Directory
Volunteer Recruiting and Management

If you are interested in these opportunities or have new ideas, please contact amy@nnpnparents.org



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MENTALLY HEALTHY IN THE CHAOS OF PARENTING

By Kayme Pumphrey, NPN member since 2005

IT IS NORMAL TO GET STRESSED WHEN YOU HAVE CHILDREN. FIND WAYS TO REDUCE THE STRESS IN YOUR LIFE AND PRACTICE THEM.

You are a parent—a playmate, educator, chef, chauffeur, nurse, disciplinarian, counselor and entertainer. The list doesn't end there, and the job description changes daily, so the question is: Where do you fit into that? As a full-time mom (to two wonderful little people) and owner of K Grace Childcare, I struggle with that question daily. I am not an expert when it comes to a "healthy lifestyle"; I rarely have time to work out, order dinner delivered more than I should and consume more calories in caffeinated beverages than most, but I've found a few things that allow me to stay mentally healthy amidst the chaos.

Take a mental break

Even a short time away helps tackle the daily ins and outs of being a parent. Take five minutes in the car, hire a babysitter for a few hours a week or use naptime to relax (instead of loading the dishwasher or doing laundry). Walk to the corner for a coffee and scone, catch up on a favorite program, write in a journal or read a magazine that isn't about sleep training or sibling rivalry.

Use available resources

Parenting is difficult, and living in a big city, albeit positive in many aspects, presents additional challenges. Resources like NPN provide information and support to ease the stress of urban living. The Discussion Forum offers an outlet to talk about anything from in-laws to kid-friendly restaurants and product reviews. NPN also provides a means to form playgroups, and my playgroup's friendship has been nothing short of essential.

Stay monetarily conscious

Financial stress can take a toll on parents, but luckily, there are countless options to help families enjoy life for less. Daily deal sites, including mamaloot.com and mamapedia.com, allow for that much-needed "me" time (with a manicure or massage) or "us" time (a date night or cooking class) without the guilt.

Take a shower

Sometimes half of the battle is to shower and put on something other than a ball cap, yoga pants and a sweatshirt. If I feel better about myself, the challenges of each day are easier to deal with.

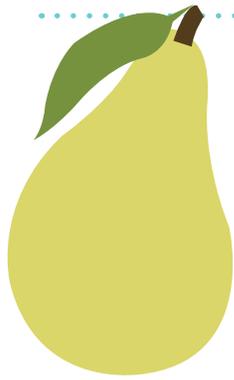
Be silly and laugh

When I am completely engaged in the task at hand, things are easier for everyone. My kids benefit from a mom who is silly and laughing (and not just playing Candy Land with one hand on the laptop), and I am more efficient at work and with household tasks. I carry the memories of our peek-a-boo games, silly-face competitions and singing parties with me and take comfort in knowing that my kids will remember these moments as meaningful regardless of how many hours a day I have with them.

It is normal to get stressed when you have children. Find ways to reduce the stress in your life and practice them. Make sure to listen to the little person who says, "I want to cuddle with you, Mommy" and the even smaller person who says "hold you." You may not be your perfect weight, but staying mentally healthy might just be enough for today.



Photo courtesy Kayme Pumphrey.



BEYOND THE NEW YEAR: HOW TO EAT RIGHT FOR LIFE

By Hope Egan, NPN member since 2006



Photo courtesy Hope Egan.

My post-college eating pattern was a disaster: give up sugar January 1. Stay on the wagon until April 15 (I was a tax accountant). Slowly allow junk food back into my life. Then—from Thanksgiving until New Year’s—allow myself to eat whatever I wanted. Repeat.

I thought this worked, but my chronic sinus infections and weight struggles revealed otherwise. I eventually transformed my eating patterns from a rollercoaster ride into a healthy lifestyle. This is possible even if you have children.

Begin with breakfast

Eating breakfast is important; it provides energy and mental clarity and helps with weight control. But you don’t have to make pancakes from scratch or whip up a quiche every day. Try eating whole grain breakfast cereal or whole grain toast and jam, plus some minimally sweetened yogurt and fruit. A satisfying, easy-to-prepare breakfast propels you one third of the way to new eating habits.

If you are willing to do a little more work, consider muesli (see sidebar). You can make several days’ worth of breakfasts in advance, and you can easily tailor it to each family member’s taste. My son does not like walnuts, so my muesli container has these healthy nuts, while Daniel’s does not.

Leftovers for lunch

I always cook dinner with lunch in mind. A salmon dinner means salmon salad for lunch, adding mayo the next day. Leftover chicken becomes the protein for a green salad or wrap. Last night’s roasted vegetables become the centerpiece for a sandwich with hummus and feta. The necessary planning is worth it if you are tired of eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, although natural peanut butter and all-fruit jam on whole grain bread is a yummy lunch in a pinch.

Consider keeping a stocked pantry if planning is not your strong suit. Many staples (canned tuna, whole grain macaroni and cheese) are

quick and satisfying, and you can sneak in vegetables—the key to a long-term healthy lifestyle. I add shredded carrots and finely diced celery to my tuna salad, and mac-n-cheese tastes delicious with peas, a favorite with the younger crowd.

Delicious dinners

Dinners are another opportunity for veggies. Beef, chicken, fish or rice and beans are important, but vegetables boost the healthy factor—while keeping the cost and calories down. Making a large batch of homemade salad dressing motivates me to make frequent salads without them becoming boring. Roasting chunks of red pepper, onion and zucchini tossed in olive oil, salt and pepper yields a restaurant-quality side dish. And if you are super-short on time, just stir-fry whatever crunchy vegetables you have in the refrigerator (broccoli and carrots) with garlic, lemon juice and olive oil.

All these meals are good in theory, but what about children who are picky eaters? If you get to know your children’s quirks, you can probably adapt grown-up meals for them. My son detests when I combine these healthy ingredients, but if I prepare his plate before I combine them, he often finds something good to eat. For example, he won’t touch my red bean and rice salad, but if I put some red beans, red peppers and tomatoes on his plate, he usually eats them.

Desserts

Knowing that there is a tasty treat following dinner helps keep me motivated to eat well. And healthy treats—which often include whole grains, oats, nuts or nut butter, yogurt or eggs—are extremely filling. This helps me feel satisfied sooner and eat less.

Conclusions

Now that I’m a mom, I realize that eating well is no longer about fitting into a certain size jeans. I need to stay healthy and filled with energy to be the best parent I can be.

Muesli

Makes 2 servings



Prepare these in individual serving size bowls so you can make several at a time; they keep for a few days in the refrigerator. Experiment with different dried fruit—it becomes plump and juicy if you soak it the night before!

- ½ cup walnuts
- 4 dried apricots
- 4 dried plums (prunes)
- ¾ cup rolled oats
- 1½ cup milk or rice milk
- ¾ cup plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons flax meal or oat bran
- Several dashes of salt
- Several dashes of cinnamon (optional)
- Dash of honey or maple syrup (optional)

1. Coarsely chop the walnuts, apricots and dried plums.
2. Combine the walnuts and dried fruit with the remaining ingredients in a storage container with a lid. Mix well to incorporate.
3. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours or overnight. If desired add additional milk before serving.

Hope Feinglass Egan is the author of *What the Bible Says about Healthy Living Cookbook* (BSACookbook.com). She and her husband live in Lakeview with their son Daniel, whom they home school. She can be reached at hope@BSACookbook.com.

FIND YOUR GROOVE THING AND THEN YOU CAN SHAKE IT

By Justine Tan, NPN member since 2008



I'M NOT SAYING WE HAVE ALL OUR ANSWERS, BUT WE FINALLY FOUND OUR GROOVE, AND FRANKLY, IT ROCKS!



Having our baby was of course the most amazing thing that ever happened to us, but it was also confounding, isolating and frustrating. With family far away, we were pretty much on our own. As first-time parents, we naturally had more questions than answers. How much should she eat? Sleep? Poop? Is this much from such a tiny baby normal? Why is it this color?

She may be our little bundle of joy, but the earlier months were incredibly hard as we fumbled in the dark for answers and lost more than sleep. We were losing our sense of self as we were too tired for anything outside work and parenting, which meant goodbye hobbies, social life and intimacy. To not just survive but thrive, we had to do something.

The sleep

At 10 months, our daughter still had difficulty sleeping. We had to lull her to sleep and stay in her room for at least two hours every night. Even then she would rouse in the wee hours, and we had to do it all over again. It was physically and mentally exhausting. We finally succumbed to letting her cry it out. Although the initial stage was painful, she was sleeping on her own and through the night in a week. Operation Save Our Sanity/Family: Success!

The self

A baby that slept from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. meant we could afford more time to ourselves and pursue interests that fell away while we juggled work, parenting and fatigue. I started a blog to chronicle our lives for our daughter, practice my writing and bridge the gap from the old me to my new role as mom—three birds, one stone. I also connected with moms whose virtual support gave me much-needed confidence and perspective. Four birds!

Belonging to a community really helped. Need one of your own but don't know where to start? Check out NPN's New Moms groups and Neighborhood Clubs. Join a book club or meet like-minded parents through meetup.com.

The relationship

As our baby slept, we nurtured our relationship. There were more dinners, movies, concerts and theatre, but babysitters could get expensive. We joined a babysitting co-op to trade sitting time, and we also asked friends and family for help. We also connected over a quiet dinner and a bottle of wine at home. Sometimes, we'd even light candles. The ambiance is a bonus, as romance is always nice, but the essential element is that we talk about what matters to us as a couple—our values, goals and dreams. We also try to celebrate the people we were before the baby with little things like impromptu takeout and movie night. After all, our daughter will leave our house someday, and we will have only each other. Investing in our relationship now makes perfect sense.

The sanity

I'm not saying we have all our answers, but we finally found our groove, and frankly, it rocks! The path you take to find yours as a family will undoubtedly be different, and remember, it's not selfish to put yourself or your relationship above your family sometimes. Like the oxygen mask you put on yourself before your children, it's imperative for survival.



Photo courtesy Justine Tan.

Justine Tan is a full-time marketing and communications professional who resides in Andersonville with her partner Nick and their two-year-old daughter Tegan (plus two cats and a dog). She blogs on the side at HereWhereIHaveLanded.com.

LOVE YOUR BABY AND YOUR BODY

By Amanda Marijanovic,

NPN member since 2008

EXPERT TIPS ON HOW TO LOOK AND FEEL GREAT AFTER PREGNANCY

The dreaded “fourth trimester”—the six weeks after delivery when your body continues to change. Even after you’ve managed to get into your old size, don’t be surprised if your clothes don’t flatter you the way they used to. Changes in fat deposits and lost muscle tone play a role in altering your body shape and may create new problem areas like a flabby belly or excess bulk on the hips and thighs. The good news? A healthy diet and gradual return to exercise can help restore your body to its pre-pregnancy state. And while re-establishing a fitness regime may not seem like a priority when you’d rather cuddle your newborn all day, the sooner you get started, the easier it will be and the faster you’ll see results. You’ll also benefit from increased energy, fewer aches and pains, improved self-esteem and reduced risk for postpartum depression.

Start back smart

Begin gentle, non-stressful exercise shortly after childbirth—as soon as you feel ready. In these first four to six weeks, focus on the quality of your actions rather than the number of repetitions to ensure a safe progression. Recommended moves include Kegels (to strengthen the pelvic floor), pelvic tilts, heel slides, toe taps and basic yoga/Pilates poses like the bird dog and half cat. These types of exercises help to draw your trans-abdominal muscles back in and stabilize your core for recovery. Do not do traditional crunches at this stage; they can actually create more excess belly flab long-term. Avoid jogging and lifting weights but resume gentle cardio such as short walks (up to 15 minutes). After your six-week check-up with your OB/GYN, you should be cleared for more regular exercise. Gradually increase intensity and add new modes of exercise as your strength increases and recovery progresses.

Set specific, realistic goals and make a plan

Be realistic about your schedule as a new mom and think creatively about ways to fit activity into your lifestyle. Aim for 30 minutes of mid-intensity exercise daily. Remember, three 10-minute cycles throughout the day are as effective as doing it all at once! Put your baby in a front carrier while you vacuum or clean the house, and do simple moves like squats, lunges and glute kickbacks. Plan daily stroller walks around your neighborhood for fresh air, exercise and errands. Pop in a post-pregnancy fitness DVD during naptime or after bedtime. Lift “weights” (milk, cans and jars) while putting away groceries.

Take a class for new moms

The fitness needs of a new mom are significantly different than the average exerciser, so before you head back to the gym to hit your favorite spin or cardio kick-boxing class, consider a class designed specifically for postpartum recovery, strengthening and toning. The best part? Baby can be part of it with you! It’s a fantastic experience for bonding with your little one and offers the bonus of meeting other new moms to share helpful advice and support.

Look great throughout your transformation

What’s a new mom supposed to wear? After saying “good-bye!” to your maternity clothes, you might need time before fitting into your old wardrobe. Flatter your transitioning figure with slightly more forgiving clothes that still offer high style. Drawstring waists help avoid the “muffin top” look as does a body slimming undergarment. Look for tops that are fitted through the bust and arms but more flowing in the waist.

NOTE: Always check with your doctor before beginning any new fitness regime. If you had a complicated pregnancy or delivery, certain restrictions may prevent you from doing these exercises immediately.

Amanda Marijanovic is a Chicago native and Certified Group Fitness Instructor with the American Council on Exercise. She is the owner of Fit Mamas Club (fitmamasclub.com) and mother to two-year-old twin boys, Max and Miles.



Photo courtesy Amanda Marijanovic.



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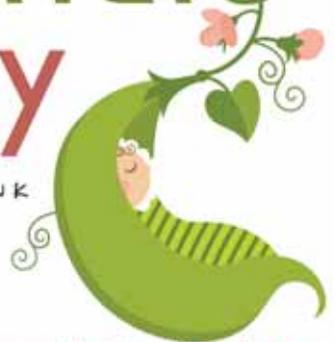


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GIVING BACK TO OUR SWEET HOME CHICAGO

By Brenna M. Woodley,

NPN member since 2010

About two years ago my husband declared, “If I don’t start helping others now, I never will.” I might have dismissed this statement as indicative of some sort of midlife crisis, but it piqued my curiosity. We were a happy family of four with a comfortable lifestyle, and we could be counted on for annual charitable donations and occasional volunteer work through our church or school. Were we missing something?

We agreed that we had the time, talents and resources to do more than write checks. During the next few months, we rolled up our sleeves and looked for ways to be more active.

With the help of friends, we established Bundle of Joy, a nonprofit diaper bank that distributes disposable diapers to needy families throughout Chicago. We also established a robotics and computer-training program that teaches vocational skills to middle school students in the East Garfield Park neighborhood; helped create a volunteer corps that provides meals for homeless people, back-to-school fairs and other events at local community centers; and started a blog to help busy families find volunteer opportunities around the city.

Sometimes less really is more

The more I do for others, the more time I feel I have to do it. Our journey to becoming a more community service-oriented family has involved sacrifice. If I did the math, I probably would find that we have less free time and less money. We take fewer vacations, buy fewer luxuries and give our kids fewer gifts. But it has never occurred to me to do the math because what we have gained far outweighs what we have had to give up.

We are connected to other people in a way that we never were. Many of our friends and neighbors serve with us, and we have formed deep and lasting friendships, the kind that we never seemed to have time to cultivate at the coffee shop or playground. Community service also has strengthened our marriage and family life. The volunteer work is a topic of conversation around the dinner table. My husband and I have shared the joy—and frustration—of collaborating and building something together. Our children, now 18 and four, have a greater appreciation of their opportunities, having seen



PERHAPS THE MOST UNEXPECTED IMPACT OF OUR VOLUNTEER WORK IS THE WAY IT HAS CHANGED OUR VIEW OF CHICAGO.

that, in other neighborhoods, children go hungry and parents cannot afford basic necessities like formula and diapers.

Those little things—car repairs, school paperwork and the broken dishwasher—that used to keep me awake at night? They are still on my to-do list, but now they are relegated to their proper place in the hierarchy, and I spend a lot less time worrying about when they will get done.

A newfound appreciation of our city

Perhaps the most unexpected impact of our volunteer work is the way it has changed our view of Chicago. Our work has taken us out of the comforts of Lincoln Park and into some of the toughest and most economically challenged neighborhoods in the city. No matter where we go, we find we have a lot in common with the families we meet. Regardless of our backgrounds, most urban parents are trying to provide the best possible future for their children, navigate the educational system, locate neighborhood resources and ward off the isolation of life in a large metropolitan area. When you realize how much you have in common, suddenly Chicago does not feel quite so big.

NPN works to build community, especially for first-time parents and newcomers to the city, by helping to connect them to resources and other families with similar circumstances. We are proud to partner with NPN through Bundle of Joy to bring diapers to families throughout Chicago.



Photo courtesy Brenna M. Woodley.

Brenna Woodley is a social worker, attorney and founder of Bundle of Joy, a nonprofit diaper bank supplying disposable diapers to needy families throughout Chicago. She lives in Old Town with her husband and two children.

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY'S FUTURE TODAY

By Jessica Voelkner, NPN member since 2010

IT'S ABOUT PROTECTING YOUR WELL-BEING AND THAT OF YOUR FAMILY. THOSE ARE PRECIOUS "ASSETS" WE ALL HAVE.

Creating a last will can be stressful but, as a parent, you honestly can't afford to put it off any longer. The good news is that estate planning can be relatively easy and affordable. Here's a quick overview of the basics of wills and estate plans for parents and the services that make the process as pain-free as possible.

Wills and Estate Planning 101

Most of us consider estate planning as something reserved only for the wealthy. But that's not the case. Your estate can include your home, bank accounts, life insurance and all other possessions. Plus, the primary value of an estate plan (in my opinion) isn't really about these assets. It's about protecting your well-being and that of your family. Those are precious "assets" we all have.

Rather than a specific document, an estate plan is a group of legal documents and tools customized to your circumstances. Basic documents every parent should consider are:

- **Last Will** – controls naming a guardian for your child and transferring property to loved ones
- **Powers of Attorney** – one for property (giving a loved one access to a safety deposit box, bank accounts and other property) and one for health care (giving a loved one the ability to make medical decisions for you)
- **Living Will** – specifies how you would like to be cared for if you become incapacitated, specifically your wishes for or against extreme medical interventions



Photo courtesy Jessica Voelkner.

- **HIPAA Authorization Form** – allows your loved ones to access your medical records and communicate with your physicians on your behalf
- **Revocable Living Trust** – protects your assets (including bank accounts, investments and home) by controlling how they are managed during your lifetime (even if you become incapacitated) and then transferred to your children after you die

Online doesn't need to mean DIY

Have you ever trimmed your own bangs? Given yourself a pedicure? If you're like me, you probably didn't end up with the results that you hoped for. There's a growing trend towards do-it-yourself wills, and the results are just as unpredictable as a DIY haircut. With a will, though, you may never know if you were successful. It's your family who faces the consequences.

Very simple mistakes—like not signing the will correctly—can make a will invalid. And mistakes in answering the questionnaire can lead to huge problems, like disinheriting a child by mistake (it happens more often than you might think).

Websites like LegalZoom™ and Nolo® allow people to create their own wills with general legal guidance. But before considering these options, look at alternatives that allow an attorney licensed in Illinois to review your individual documents. This includes getting estate-planning documents by visiting a law firm. There is, however, an easier alternative for the most basic documents. Some law firms now allow you to submit estate-planning forms online that an attorney reviews before delivering. This provides an extra layer of protection from mistakes and gives your family a place to turn if they have questions after you're gone.

Jessica Voelkner is a Chicago-area mom and director of marketing at Smarter Will (smarterwill.com) powered by Chicago-area law firm Hedeker & Perrelli, Ltd. Smarter Will is taking on the big DIY will sites by providing Illinois residents with online, attorney-reviewed estate planning documents and resources.





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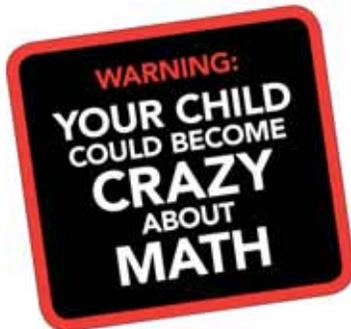
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MEAN MOMMY

By Kerry Maiorca, NPN member since 2007

SOMETIMES IT FEELS GOOD TO SULK, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM. BUT SAYING GOODBYE TO MEAN MOMMY FEELS SO MUCH BETTER!

For the past few weeks we've had an unwanted house guest. You probably know her, or someone like her. I like to call her Mean Mommy.

She shows up when life gets busy and I'm not taking enough time for myself. Whenever she's around, my perception of daily life is distorted so that what would normally seem like one of life's little hiccups becomes a catastrophic event. Conversations with my husband slip into a rehashing of pointless old arguments, instead of being a chance for us to connect. My son's persistent requests to be the pit crew for his racecars have me gritting my teeth. My daughter's insistence on doing everything herself seems to be a personal attack on my sanity instead of a normal expression of toddler independence. All I can focus on is how mad I am, and how mad I am at myself for being so mad. And so the cycle continues and Mean Mommy's visit lingers!



The first step in breaking the cycle is to schedule some me-time. For me that's practicing yoga, reading a good book, getting a massage or going for a walk. Once I've prioritized my own needs, it's easier to bring my fully present self to my family and work. Then I can apologize, let it go and do my best to start over and approach the next moment with a fresh perspective. It's hard. Sometimes it feels good to sulk, at least in the short term. But saying goodbye to Mean Mommy feels so much better!

Five ways to say goodbye to Mean Mommy:

- 1. Take a walk, take it all in:** Put on your walking shoes and head to one of Chicago's fabulous parks. Just being in a green space with trees, grass, plants and birds can do wonders for your mental state. Breathe deeply and resist the temptation to plug in your headphones or make a phone call. Remember that the world is bigger than your kids fighting over the Legos.
- 2. Nurture the nurturer:** So much of your daily life as a mom is about taking care of others. Recharge your batteries with a relaxing and nurturing experience such as a massage. Try to keep your mind focused on the experience rather than going through your grocery list. Don't be afraid to let your to-dos wait for an hour or two...they'll be there for you afterwards!
- 3. Enjoy your own private story time:** Head to your local library or bookstore and tell Dr. Seuss you'll make an appointment with him another time. Pick out a good book and enjoy the pleasure of slowing down and getting lost in the story.
- 4. Reconnect with a good friend:** Spend some quality time with someone you care about and try to avoid the usual kid-focused topics. Pick an activity that will stimulate your non-mommy brain and fuel a great grown-up conversation, such as a visit to the Art Institute.
- 5. Stretch out, don't veg out:** Instead of watching television or sitting in front of the computer at night, do something good for your body and mind to prepare you for a good night of sleep. See the following page for a simple yoga sequence to get you started.

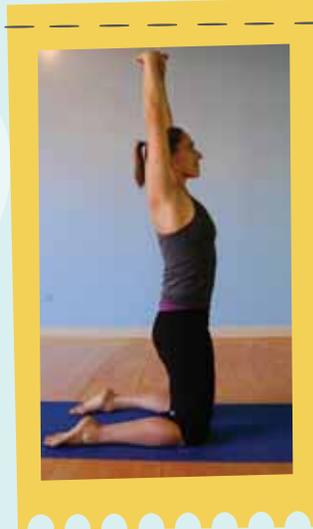
Kerry Maiorca is a mother of two and director of Bloom Yoga Studio in Lincoln Square. Though Mean Mommy has not been banished from the Maiorca household, her visits are much less frequent now that me-time has become a priority!

YOGA IN YOUR PJs

Skip the yoga clothes and mat and try the sequence below right on your bed. Even five minutes can make a difference in how you feel as you wind down from the day. Breathe deeply and savor the sensations these poses produce in your body. It should all feel good, so if you feel any discomfort, adjust until it feels good for you.



Child's pose with arms extended



Kneeling mountain pose with arms overhead



Cat



Cow



Hamstring stretch



Thread the needle



Cobbler's pose with backbend



Cobbler's pose with forward bend



Nighty-night, Mommy!

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Dawn Ellis-Ferzacca, *Bright Horizons Family Solutions*,
NPN member since 2009

BRINGING THE CONCEPTS OF EMPATHY, COMPASSION AND SOCIAL AWARENESS TO A LEVEL AT WHICH YOUNG CHILDREN CAN UNDERSTAND AND RELATE

What better place to teach young children about the world than in Chicago? The city thrives with opportunities to develop an understanding of the global world around them. People of all nationalities walk the streets, displaying their culture with pride. Languages other than English fill neighborhoods and are spoken on playgrounds. There is a rich, beautiful sense of community in the city and suburbs that speaks to an awareness of individuality and organizations such as NPN that cultivate opportunities to interact with other families. That is why I have chosen to work with young children and raise my own child here.

Be a tourist in your own backyard

Each weekend, we ask our two-year old daughter, "What would you like to do today?" Often, her response is, "Go to the Gardens (Botanic Gardens)" or "Ride the train." Growing up in upstate New York, I didn't have the opportunity to do either of those things. I love that, at her very young age, she already has an awareness of the city and what it has to offer. And while the Gardens and the Lincoln Park Zoo are wonderful experiences for her, I am thankful that living here is giving her exposure to different cultures and nationalities. I believe this exposure and our efforts to talk with her about the different types of cultures we see will help her to be inclusive of all people throughout her life.

Volunteer as a family

Being an employee of an organization that has an active charitable foundation, my family has had the opportunity to volunteer together, and my children are learning to help those in need. In Waukegan, McHenry, Humboldt Park and many other areas throughout the city, we have created a space for children living in homeless, domestic abuse or transitional shelters or homes. This connection has been critical in developing an awareness beyond self for my family. My two-year-old and her brothers and sister, ages 14, 12 and 10, have painted, assembled toys, added fish tanks and donated supplies to different organizations through the Bright Space program. They have a much greater appreciation for all they have in this world, and they are learning compassion and understanding at an early age.

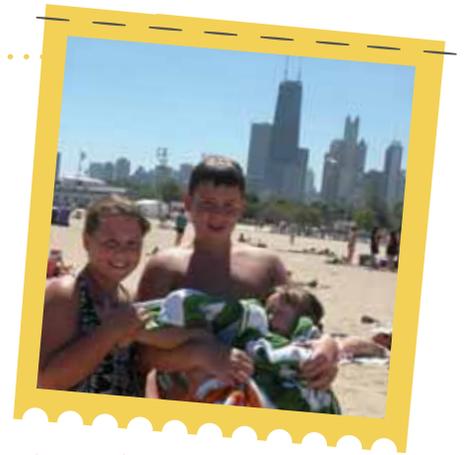


Photo courtesy
Dawn Ellis-Ferzacca.

Teach your children kindness

As both a mother and someone who works in early education, I have seen firsthand how important it is to demonstrate to young children that even small acts of kindness can make the world a better place. We recently participated in the "Great Kindness Challenge," which encourages children around the world to do simple, kind acts. Examples include inviting a child to play whom they have never played with before; starting a classroom coin jar and donating the money to a charity the children help select; or writing and sending a thank-you note to a community worker such as a firefighter, crossing guard or librarian. These types of activities are easy for families to do together at home and enable you to bring the concepts of empathy, compassion and social awareness to a level young children can understand and relate.

"Developing compassion and caring for others begins at home with the way we relate to our closest family members and friends. Our behavior, body language, words and actions toward others are closely observed by children in their effort to learn how to be in the world."—
From Bright Horizons Toward a Better World curriculum component of The World at Their Fingertips

Resources

Here are a few of my favorite websites for ideas, tips and resources for parents who are looking for ways to teach their child empathy, compassion and social awareness at home.

volunteerfamily.org

greatkindnesschallenge.org

brighthouse.com/betterworld



For ideas on ways to engage as a family in volunteer opportunities and raise children who are compassionate, self-motivated, tolerant and caring, listen to an on-demand webinar hosted by Bright Horizons Family Solutions in partnership with The Volunteer Family at brighthouse.com/rsrwebinar.

Dawn Ellis-Ferzacca lives in Buffalo Grove with her daughter and three stepchildren. She has worked for Bright Horizons Family Solutions for 15 years and been a parent enrolled in its center for two and a half years. She volunteers for Bright Horizons Foundation for Children and the locally based Super Jake Foundation.

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The background of the advertisement shows a group of children and an adult instructor in a gym setting, with palm trees and a blue sky backdrop. The children are wearing white t-shirts with colorful designs.

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RAISING TWINS: ONE CHILD AT A TIME

By Eileen Byrne Richards, NPN member since 2008

When our twins were born, our parenting routine was two: two diapers, two bottles and two babies asleep in two cribs equaled two exhausted, happy parents. Now that our girls have reached the age of two, we continue to foster the development of their two distinct personalities, skill sets and talents. Our children are not a set, and whether you have multiples or not, each child should be raised as the unique child that she is.

Dr. Brenda Henderson, mother of 15-year-old identical twin girls and a clinical child psychologist and program administrator for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, acknowledges that it can be easy to group your children together. "But the more time you spend individually, even if it's just taking a walk around the block or a trip to the grocery store, the more you can appreciate their unique differences."

Parents can help multiples develop individual identities by allowing them to express themselves and make their own choices. Pam Chay is the patient care coordinator of multiple births at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and mother of multiples Brendan and Collin. "We celebrate their birthday together, same kids, same activities but once we did a combo Pokemon and Batman party. Usually there's one cake but each picks a theme for their side."



(L-R) Myka and Brin Matykiewicz with Mary Claire and Nora Richards. Photo courtesy Eileen Byrne Richards.

Should twins be separated in school? Dr. Henderson says there is no right answer, and it will depend on your children's needs and school policy. She recommends research and requesting policies in writing. By the time your twins are college age, they'll decide whether or not to go it alone. Brian Nolan is an identical twin and recalls, "Going to different high schools allowed us to develop our personalities at our own pace, and we didn't have to worry about being compared. Going to the same college was great. I was very shy and it was nice to have my brother as a roommate the first time we were away from home."

How should a parent respond when one child is excelling? Jeannie Monahan Grzelaczyk has two sets of twins. "I sat my [10-year-old] daughters down and told them that they both excel in certain areas and that they have to be happy with each of their talents." Pam Chay says, "One of our sons has a learning disability. Learning comes very easy for our other child. My husband and I let them know that everyone has a different learning style and can be good at different things."

When it comes to personality and competitiveness, if one twin is dominant in your family, Dr. Henderson emphasizes taking turns so that each child will have a chance to participate.

Brian Nolan remembers how competitive he and his twin were in sports. "It was great motivation, and being able to play against him regularly made me better. But if we were ever in a group, we always stood up for each other. It was okay for us to fight amongst ourselves while playing, but not for someone else to do it."

He says he was never lonely. "Quite the opposite—you always know there is someone there at your back." Eileen Casey Ryan fondly remembers, "There was no one I felt closer to than my twin. I always felt that she was my soul mate. I always felt safe having two of us."

Here's hoping that my twins will be so lucky. They're each making a friend for life.

Eileen Byrne Richards is a former Chicago radio talk host turned stay-at-home mom with twin girls. She volunteers with NPN as the Multiples co-chair and is available at multiples@nnpnparents.org.

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HANDPICKED FROM THE FORUMS

BIRTHDAY PARTY IDEAS

Compiled by **Beth Cohen-Dorfman**, NPN member since 2008

Parents are always looking for birthday party options so we decided to do a little homework for our members. While this list is certainly not comprehensive, we've tried to give you the most up-to-date information. Please contact each place you are considering to confirm the details. Party on, NPN!

Venue	Price/Duration	Number of Kids	Ages
The Adler Planetarium	\$14–\$19/child, \$16–\$21/adult	Unlimited	3 and up
Bubbles Academy	\$550/enrolled kids, \$750/non-enrolled, 90 minutes	15	1–6
Build A Bear	\$10–\$26/child, 1 hour	6 minimum	2 and up
Capi's Pizza Party and Chicago Children's Museum at Navy Pier	\$500, 2 hours, includes admission to Chicago Children's Museum	10 minimum/25 maximum	4–10
Chuck E Cheese	\$12.99–\$17.99/child, 2 hours	4 minimum	4–10
Dairy Queen/Orange Julius Lincoln Park*	\$250 (\$200 for NPN members), 2 hours for the room	20–30	All ages
Diversey River Bowl	\$16/child, 2 hours	10 minimum	3 and up
Emerald City Theatre School	\$425 on site or at Flourish, 90 minutes	18	3½–10, best for drop-off parties
Fantasy Kingdom	\$225–\$850 depending on day of the week, duration and package	15–20	1–6
The Field Museum	\$600, 10% discount for members	Up to 25, \$15/child for additional children	3 and up
Gymboree	\$399/members, \$429/non-members, 2 hours	25	1–5
Jump Bunch*	\$175–\$225, 45–90 minutes	10–15	2–12
Kid City	\$310–\$695, 2–2½ hours	Up to 15	1–10 or 12
Kids Science Lab	\$375/members, \$475/non-members, 1½ hours	15	2–10
The Kids' Table	\$345–\$445, 90 minutes	10 (you can add more for an up-charge)	2 with parents 3 and up otherwise
Lil' Kickers	\$195/members, \$240/non-members, 2 hours	16	All ages
Little Beans Café	\$200/space, \$8/person, 2 hours	10–50	All ages
The Little Gym	\$375/members, \$415/non-members, 90 minutes	16 for base price; up to 30 for an extra charge	1–12
Margate Park Field House	\$52/hour	50 maximum	All ages
Merry Music Makers*	\$150–\$300 (\$50 discount for enrolled kids), 2 hours	8–12 depending on the package	All ages
Museum of Science & Industry	\$425, 3-hour room access	15	3 and up
My Corner Playroom	\$185–\$970, 2 hours	12–20	All ages
My Gym*	\$325–\$425 (+\$40 for non-members), 90 minutes	Up to 18 or 23 depending on the package	1–7
The Paintbrush	\$325–\$675 and up (average party is \$450), 90 minutes	11–25 depending on the package	3 and up
The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum*	\$400/members, \$450/non-members, 2 hours	Many!	All ages
Pied Piper	\$650 (very inclusive)	15, \$12/additional child up to 30	1–10
Pump It Up*	\$300–\$410 "Windy City Mini" package, 90 minutes \$399–\$549 "Classic" package, 2 hours	15 "Windy City Mini" 26 "Classic"	3 and up
Smarty Party*	\$400–\$525, 90 minutes	15	1–10
Swedish American Museum	\$150–\$200/regular parties, \$275–\$325/private parties, 3 hours	30–50 total guests (including adults) depending on package	3 and up
Unicoi Art Studio	\$340–\$390, 90 minutes–2 hours	up to 15 (more for extra charge)	3 and up
Windy City Field House	\$300–\$500, 2–2½ hours, depending on package	11–25 depending on package	All ages
YMCA Lakeview	\$200+/members, \$350+/non-members, 90 minutes	20 (more for extra charge)	1–12

Shaded boxes indicate NPN business members

*Check NPN Parent Perks for members-only discounts!

Beth Cohen-Dorfman organizes NPN's New Moms Groups. She lives in Lakeview East with her husband and two kids.



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Reason To Give provides families and schools in Chicago's Humboldt Park community with basic necessities like winter gear, household appliances, dress clothes for job interviews and school supplies, among other things. Unlike charities or seasonal food & clothing drives, Reason To Give is personal, direct and year-round. Qualifying applicants share their story and need on video and visitors to the site can donate directly to their cause.

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NPN NEIGHBORHOOD PICKS

WINTER FAVORITES

Compiled by Amy Archer,

NPN member since 2003



Our amazing volunteers run NPN social and support groups all over Chicago. Here are a few of their favorite spots to take the kids and escape the cold.

ANDERSONVILLE/EDGEWATER

Eat: O'Shaughnessy's Public House, 4557 N. Ravenswood
great service, food, Irish music

Play: Women and Children First Books, 5233 N. Clark
story time Weds. 10:30 a.m.

LAKEVIEW

Eat: Frasca's, 3358 N. Paulina
kids eat FREE every day 4:30-6 p.m.

Eat: Bakin' & Eggs, 3120 N. Lincoln
awesome brunch and kids eat FREE Thurs.

Play: The Ankle Todd Show, 1225 W. Belmont
fun variety show Sat. 4 p.m.; \$5 kids <10, \$7 >10

NEAR WEST/NEAR SOUTH

Eat: Demitasse Cafe, 1066 W. Taylor
great food, toys

Eat: Wishbone, 1001 W. Washington
great kids menu, kids eat FREE Tues.

Play: Merit Scool of Music, 38 S. Peoria
classes for newborns to adults

OLD TOWN/GOLD COAST

Eat: Yolk, 355 E. Ohio,
great breakfast, brunch, lunch

Play: Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago
great kid-friendly activities, second Saturday of each month FREE

Play: Open Books, 213 W. Institute
beautiful fun space, great events (story time, puppet shows)

PORTAGE PARK/OLD IRVING PARK

Eat: Chicago's Pizza and Pasta, 4520 W. Irving Park
decorate your own Mickey Mouse pizza, BYOB

Play: Eli's Cheesecake Company, 6701 W. Forest Preserve
low-cost factory tours, tasty café

Play: Schiller Woods, Irving Park and Cumberland
FREE sledding and coasting hill

SOUTH LOOP

Eat: Tapas Valencia, 1530 S. State
great food for big and little people

Play: Park 550, 1801 S. Indiana
great FREE indoor Park District space

WEST TOWN

Eat: Bake, 2246 W. North
best baked goods ever, toys,
toddler-sized chalk board tables

Play: Building Blocks Toy Store, 2130 W. Division
great toys to play with, welcoming staff

.....
Amy Archer has two school-age boys who still love to visit Timeless Toys (4749 N. Lincoln) for the great selection; you can stay and play awhile, too. For an easy dinner out, her boys love to take the Brown Line train to Rockwell's Grill (4632 N. Rockwell) for great food and super-friendly staff!



**Neighborhood Parents
Network of Chicago**

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Chicago, IL 60657
312.409.2233
nnpnparents.org
info@nnpnparents.org

UPCOMING EVENTS



DECEMBER

30

4:30–7:30 pm

NPN Pre-New Year's Eve Celebration Event - Members only!

Lil' Kickers Bradley Place

2640B W. Bradley Place, Chicago

Ring in the New Year one day early and celebrate with soccer classes, arts and crafts, inflatables, food, giveaways and "countdowns" on the hour.

JANUARY

8

10:30 am–12 noon

Parent University: Survive Potty Training with Swellbeing

Flourish Studios

3020 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago



Done with diapers? Janeen Hayward will help you devise a reasonable and practical strategy for toilet training your toddler.

JANUARY

23

4:30–6:30 pm

New Member Mingle

Bubbles Academy

1504 N. Fremont Street, Chicago

Meet other families new to NPN—come for open play, pizza and family fun!

MARCH

5

9:30 am–12:30 pm

3rd Annual Wake Up & Boogie Down Family Festival

The Cubby Bear

1059 W. Addison Street, Chicago

A rockin' good time for the whole family—fantastic live music, dancing, kids activities and giveaways.

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* Follow us on **Twitter**, <http://twitter.com/NPNparents>, and send us a Tweet!

Events, news, contests and giveaways!

***Congrats to our
Facebook Halloween
Photo winner:***

Angie and her little rocker Madison



Find even more events on nnpnparents.org!